

Putting the Pot on the Fire. If using a stove, you should cook over a low to moderate flame. If you cook over a fire, the coals should be hot, but the fire controlled. Since a fire provides a larger cooking area, it also gives you more flexibility. You can arrange the fire so that one area is used for baking and another for cooking, or you can cook a main dish and make coffee at the same time. The first rule for backcountry culinary success is "avoid disaster." There are four likely disasters that a new outdoor cook should watch out for:

The first is burning. Always cook on low heat. Make sure there is enough water in the pot, and check often to see if more is needed. As your sauces begin to thicken, stir often. Always cook in a clean pot which has no old food stuck to the bottom. When baking, carefully regulating your heat source is particularly important. To prevent burning when using a covered skillet dutch oven style, it is important to check the temperature of the coals before placing a pan on them. Baked foods are more likely to burn on the bottom than on the top. Hold your hand about six inches above the coals; they should be hot, but you should be able to keep your hand in place for eight seconds. The coals and burning twigs you place on the lid should feel hotter than those on the bottom and should cover the entire lid. When baking, check the food and the coal temperature from time to time. If you are baking something prone to "falling," don't look in during the first five to ten minutes unless you smell something burning. Otherwise, when you check, remove the hot coals from the lid and look in quickly, trying to keep the cold air out. When you are finished checking, replace the coals on the lid. Replace coals as they cool off, both under and on top of the oven. Don't let a stove discourage you from baking. Use a low flame under the pan and build a small twig fire on the lid. Maintain constant temperatures under and over the pan, and you've got an oven environment for your favorite baked delicacy. Whether baking a pie or cooking a chowder, you can avoid burning by paying constant attention to your fire or stove.

The second disaster is overspicing. Spices should be used creatively, but also experimented with cautiously, a little at a time. Add, stir, then taste. Let the flavor settle in fully before you decide to add a little more. Never add the spice directly from the bottle to the pot. Shake it into your hand first. An unexpected loose cap can turn a "hint" of spice into the main course. Be aware of the saltiness of flavor bases before adding salt. If you are cooking with a bouillon cube, remember you already have a good amount of salt in the dish.

The third disaster is lumpy food. Powders like flour or dried milk should be mixed with liquid before adding them to a dish or sprinkled a little at a time with constant stirring. With freeze-dried foods, let them boil for ten to fifteen minutes before adding other ingredients. Thickeners, such as milk or cheese, should always be added last.

The final disaster is overdone food. This disaster is more subtle, but can be avoided. Keep tasting as you are cooking, and remember, even after you pull a pot from the fire, it will continue to cook. It is better to err on the side of undercooking, which is easily correctable.

As with other military activities, to be a good field cook takes the right attitude; a combination of caution and boldness. Caution in thoroughly understanding the nutritional needs of your unit, and carefully planning well-thought-out field rations. Caution also in following new recipes step by step and using spices artfully, with moderation. Your confidence as an outdoor cook will grow quickly with a few successes because appetite is always working for you. Food tastes great after a hard day in the outdoors. Once you're properly equipped with field cooking gear and have learned how to prepare nutritious outdoor meals, you will be more ready to complete any Militia mission in the field.

Here are a few recipes to get you started as a field cook (although the Logan bread is easier to prepare at home and then eat on the trail):

Logan Bread

5 cups water

4 pounds whole wheat flour

1. pound soy flour

2-1/2 cups raw or dark brown sugar, firmly packed

1-1/4 tsp. baking powder

1-1/2 tsp. salt

1-1/2 cups honey

1-1/2 cups dark molasses

2. cups melted shortening

Mix all ingredients thoroughly. Do not use a weak spoon or try this when your arm is already feeling sore (this dough lets you know it's substantial food right from the start). It should be tough stuff; if it isn't, add some more flour. Flours do vary in the amount of liquid they absorb. When it's all mixed, bake it in 2-inch deep baking pans for an hour at 350 degrees. Cut it into 2-inch squares while it is still warm. Set the oven for warm, put the bread in to dry with the door left ajar, and leave it for 8 to 12 hours. Time depends upon temperature, humidity and your taste. The longer you leave it, the tougher it will get. As long as it is dried fairly well, it keeps for a long, long time. (Note: There are many recipes for this dense, hard trail bread. You can eat Logan bread for breakfast or as a snack, just like the brown biscuits in the British Army ration pack. This recipe and those that follow are from "America's Backpacking Book" by Raymond Bridge, published in 1973)

Corned Beef and Cabbage (for one)

3. ounces dried flaked cabbage

4. ounces dried potato slices

1. ounce dried onions

2. to 4 tbsp. margarine
salt & pepper to taste
1/2 can (12-ounce size) corned beef
Put everything except the meat into 4 cups of boiling water, and cook until tender, around 15-minutes. Pour off excess water, dice the beef in and serve.

Dumpling Mix

1. cup flour
2. tbsp. soy flour
3. tbsp. dehydrated eggs
4. tbsp. dried milk
1-1/2 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. salt
1. tbsp. shortening

Mix the ingredients at home, cutting in the shortening. In camp any amount you like can be mixed with enough water to make a soft dough. Then drop spoonfuls into the top of a cooking stew or soup, cover, and allow to cook 20-minutes. The same dough can be baked in a pan or twisted on a stick over a fire to make bannock (an unleavened griddlecake, usually made with oatmeal or barley).

Stew (for one)

4 ounces dried vegetables
4 ounces macaroni
2. ounces beef-flavored vegetable protein or freeze-dried ground beef
3. tbsp. soy flour
4. tbsp. margarine
1. tbsp. instant beef bouillon
salt, pepper, oregano, sage, garlic to taste
Drop everything into a quart of boiling water and cook until done, depending on the longest cooking vegetables.

Bulgur and Cheese (for one)

1. cup bulgur wheat
1. tbsp. dried minced onion
1. bouillon cube (2 if you like)
2. tbsp. margarine
1/4 pound cheddar cheese
3. tbsp. Parmesan or Romano cheese
salt & pepper to taste

Mix the first three ingredients in advance. Cook 15-minutes with 2-1/2 cups water, and then add the cheese, salt and pepper.□
